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LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

FEBRUARY
1992

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*O Lord, I call to you,
come to me quickly;
hear my voice
when I cry to you.*

*Let my prayer rise before
you as incense;
the lifting up of my
hands as the
evening
sacrifice.*

P R A Y E R

Cover meditation ♦♦

"Let my prayer be counted as incense before you. . . ."

Psalm 141

What might a prayer smell like?

Bread baking . . . baby powder . . .
Praise God's holy name!

Sour milk . . . cold sweat . . .
Calm my fears and worries.

Grandma's house . . . melted butter . . .
God is great, God is good.

Bus fumes . . . hotel rooms . . .
What is your will, O Lord?

Gas leak . . . storm brewing . . .
Protect me from this trouble.

Cut roses . . . closed-up room . . .
Comfort me in my grief.

Principal's office . . . communion wine . . .
Forgive me, let me forgive.

Cedar chest . . . line-dried sheets . . .
Pour out your blessings upon us.

Spring day . . . Christmas trees . . .
Thanks be to God! Amen!

*Sue Edison-Sw
Associate Edit*

ON THE COVER: Psalm 141:1-2 (adapted) from Service of Evening Prayer, *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Batik by Connie Helgeson-Moen, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

February 1992
Volume 5
No. 2

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For the benefit of Women of the ELCA participants, feature articles relating to Women of the ELCA mission areas are marked with these symbols:
= action, ☶ = community and ☽ = growth.

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How to Use This Issue

I have found that labeling everyday experiences as prayer cues is helpful. Whenever I hear a siren, I pray for the people and situation involved. When I pray for those hungry and homeless, and for all whose emergencies seem permanent, but for whom no siren ever sounds.”—Karen Helang (p. 29).

I was deeply moved when I read that provocative insight into prayer. And as the issue unfolded, I found myself being deeply moved over and over again by much of what the writers were saying—and doing—about prayer.

So much so that I am now moved to urge strongly each of you to see this issue on prayer as ripe for action. For in a Christian's faith life, prayer and action are inextricably linked, as Eileen King reminds us in her article on World Day of Prayer (p. 14).

The action I am suggesting is that you *run, not walk* with this issue under your arm to your pastor, Christian education director, adult forum leader—indeed, whoever will listen—and let them know how practical this issue is for group study in parishes. From it could readily come a single-session study, a six-week series or a retreat on any number of aspects of prayer. To suggest a few:

► Take Eva Rogness' article looking at ecumenical insights into prayer. Let this taste encourage further study and reflection. Or invite speak-

ers from some of the other churches and faith groups that she mentions.

♦ Explore the *Lutheran Book of Worship* as a rich resource for personal prayer and devotion, as outlined by Paul Westermeyer in his article on page 12.

♦ “A Father Looks at Prayer” has myriad possibilities. Men's groups should relish it. Women's too. Better yet, have them study it together.

♦ Want to plumb the topic of prayer and God's will? Then look up articles by Michael Ostrom and Cheryl Meinschein. What about expectations and prayer? Look up Donna Hacker Smith. “Postures for Prayer”? Look up Constance Beck.

♦ And by all means use the prayers from the two devotions (pp. 47, 48) for personal or group prayer.

The ideas could go on, but now it's up to you—and the Holy Spirit. Women, you who are so vitally interested and active in prayer, here is a chance to offer a special gift to your congregations. Let us hear about what happens. We'll be praying for you—and expecting results.

EDITOR

We've been missing . . .

For the past year, I have been missing the articles on "Earthcare" and our Christian responsibility for maintaining a constructive environment. They were well-written, thought-provoking and more than once resulted in positive changes in our church. . . . I would encourage the resumption of the "Earthcare" articles.

M. Jo Erickson
Minneapolis, Minnesota

AAL has made possible a generous grant to our Southeastern Synodical Women's Organization to further educate and encourage our women to responsible care of God's creation; therefore as the SWO Lutheran Woman Today coordinator, I am urging the reinstatement of the "Earthcare" section.

Anita J. Williams
Augusta, Georgia

LWT has received a number of letters voicing a similar request. We hear you, and plan to reinstate "Earthcare." However, it takes a few months to generate articles, so look for "Earthcare" again this fall. Thank you for your interest.—ED.

I was very saddened today when I opened the October 1991 issue to find out the grief and comfort series had ended. It was a real blessing to me to read all of the positive things in these articles. . . . These articles have given me hope and made me feel I just need to spend more time with the Lord and my comfort will be forthcoming.

I congratulate all . . . who put this great teaching tool together. I must admit I was less than excited [with

LWT] the first year, but I think we all resist change at the beginning and I have come to realize nothing happens overnight.

Helen Jones
Prescott, Arizona

My mail included a letter announcing the decease of *World Encounter*. It was almost as if a dear friend had died; I felt very sad. . . . [Could] *World Encounter* and *Lutheran Woman Today* be combined, and then we'd have the best of both publications?

Clara S. Hawkins
Newberry, South Carolina
[From a letter to the Rev. Herbert Chiststrom, bishop of the ELCA, routed to LWT.]

We, too, regret the loss of World Encounter to the church. To help, LWT will include, beginning later this year, a column on global mission concerns, produced with the help of global mission personnel.—ED.

Thank you . . .

I want to commend you on the beautiful and inspiring articles in the July/August issue of LWT. The articles gave food for thought long after reading them.

One in particular was "Sin" by Donald Juel. Many people still think they have to be deserving in some way to receive the grace of God. How small their comprehension of the God who "is love." His name is Redeemer. . . . I need the power of his redemption every day.

Doris Deibel
Dover, Ohio

The article "War and the Earth" in the September 1991 issue of LWT was very commendable. The huma-

pecies has certainly learned how to
e the Creation. Let us renew the
amples of Francis of Assisi and Al-
ert Schweitzer, who recognized the
ight of Creation to also simply be.

*Christine Adryan
Brecksville, Ohio*

seems hard to believe that the ar-
icle we wrote for LWT on Marriage
Encounter (February 1991) would
have such a fantastic response! We
have received almost 70 letters from
couples interested in Marriage En-
counter. One letter even arrived from
Kathmandu, Nepal. On weekends
we have presented, we have met
about 10 couples who learned about
Marriage Encounter from LWT.

*Jon and Rhonda Kalkwarf
Bartlett, Illinois*

to thank you . . .

I too am against war, against abor-
tion and the list can go on and on.
But I do not have the luxury of living
in an ivory tower. I hope Mr. Erdahl
(Does War Work? October LWT)
and so many others like him are en-
joying their freedom of speech that
has only been allowed by our country
fighting for this freedom.

My husband is in the National
Guard and he, along with many
friends, was sent to Saudi [Arabia],
leaving behind a wife, with five kids,
full-time job. . . . I went to a support
group and heard over and over from
people how the church wasn't there
for them. . . . Our troops and their
families need your support, not your
criticism.

*Ginger Bergeson
Colfax, Wisconsin*

and then . . .

I read with some dismay the Septem-
ber letter [that said]: "People may be
of gay orientation, but that does not

mean that they must act upon their
desires, nor inflict their lifestyle on
others. . . . God does not condone this
sin. . . ."

Christ said "I have come to help
the poor, the oppressed . . ." He did
not add "unless, of course, they are
gay, ethnic, female or members of a
religion other than Christianity."

The writer's attitude smacks of
bigotry, a luxury we can ill afford.
The suggestion that gays force their
lifestyle on others is open to question.

*Mary Alice Lintvedt
Canton, South Dakota*

I have just received the October LWT
and am distressed by the frequent
use of yellow print in the pages. As a
reader of your magazine for many
years, now in my late 60s, I feel that
many elderly women must have the
same age-related vision problems
that I have. It is extremely difficult
to read in this color. Just thought I
would bring this to your attention for
the future.

*Consider it "brought." We won't do
that again. Thank you for your graci-
ous spirit. LWT received many com-
ments on the yellow type, including
one written in yellow highlighter!—
ED.*

[There was] one glaring omission on
the June LWT cover [on men], that
is BOSS. Many women's contacts
with men, or a man, are with a boss.
Tom McGrath mentions boss on the
inside cover. It needs to be on the
front as well.

*Ruth Ditsch
Sun City, California*

*Letters may be edited for length or
clarity. Send comments to Letters,
Lutheran Woman Today, 8765 W.
Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631.*

Go Ahead and Pray!

Michael A. Ostrom

"Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Matthew 7:7, Revised Standard Version.

What inviting words! It is as if our Lord were making a sales pitch for prayer, utilizing the best modern marketing techniques: "Do you want something? Are you in any kind of need? Just ask and it is yours!"

So why aren't we "buying"? One reason might be the gap many of us experience between our prayerful asking and the Lord's delivery of the promised goods.

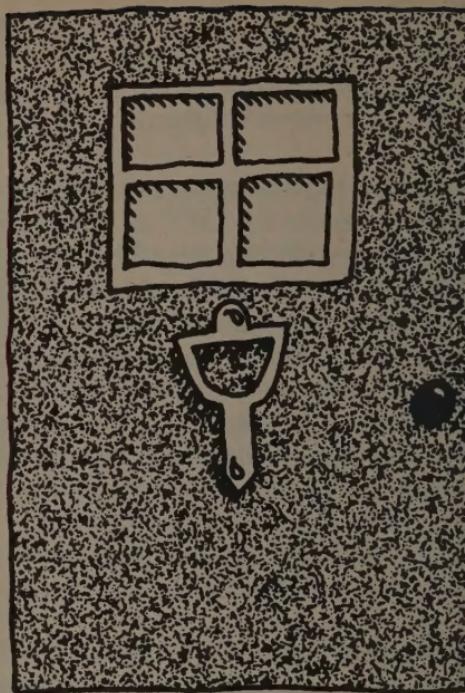
During critical moments of our lives, many of us pray just as Jesus suggests, and what do we receive? Usually silence—silence as deep and mysterious as the ocean at nightfall.

What we would much rather have is simply what we ask for, and in a timely manner. And so, after waiting and living with the silence for a while, most of us conclude that either we have done something terribly wrong that cancels out our request, or that God doesn't care and Jesus is a fraud. Living in God's silence, we come to believe more in our own abilities rather than God's, to provide for our needs and desires.

This is how prayer, and the life of prayer to which we Christians are called, can be short-circuited. We grow impatient, anxious, weary. As we wait upon the Lord, the wiles of the devil attack our feeble hearts and we lose trust in those gracious words that invite us to cast our cares and our lives upon the Lord.

"Ask, seek, knock."

Our Lord's words sound so sweet to the ear. We want to



believe them! Or at least a part of us does. But how can we? They are too unbelievable, too untrustworthy! How can we be sold, convinced?!

Ah, but these are not the words of a marketeer! These are not the words of one trying to convince us to buy one product over another. We are not being sold a bill of goods here, so we had best stop looking for one. There comes a time when our search for answers to our ever-present doubts needs to be stopped, so that we can simply hear God's Word for us and believe!

"Ask, seek, knock."

This is the Word of the Lord for us! With this Word our doubt-filled search is put to an end. This is the Word of the Lord, the One who selflessly endured our impatience and lack of trust in God. Who upon a cross fashioned by our doubt conquers our doubt with limitless love, creating within us new hearts that believe the unbelievable—that God's faithfulness is true and our faithlessness is false!

"Ask, seek, knock."

This is the promise of our Lord of love! So go ahead, dare to pray to the God who provides for us even to the point of giving his life. Trust God who loves us. Trust God with our every need—indeed, with our whole life!

Now, it is also true: We will most likely have to do some waiting for some of God's blessings. And we may not always receive exactly what we want (as if we know what's best for our lives anyway!). As much as we strive to resist it, we have to face reality: The Garden of Gethsemane is not the province of Christ alone; it is the setting for our lives as well.

But what does that matter when we have the Lord of Life as our God? The Lord who loves us is no longer dead, but risen; Jesus holds the power of life eternal, and it is for us both now and in the future. That Jesus is our Lord is the greatest reality of all—the truth that swallows up every other reality in life! We need nothing else to fill our hearts with hope and joy, even in the midst of anxiety and want.

"Ask, seek, knock."

Undergirding these words is nothing less than the promise of the Almighty God ruling in the risen Jesus our Lord. So let us pray—and make ready to receive whatever we may need for life, because the life and the faithful love of God are for us both today and always! ■

The Rev. Michael A. Ostrom, formerly associate pastor of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Arlington Heights, Illinois, is now a student at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, focusing on systematic theology and ethics.



God's Will and Prayer

Cheryl F. Meinschein

It seems that the older I get, the more complicated praying becomes.

When I was a child, prayer seemed fairly simple. There was grace before meals, and "Now I lay me down to sleep" before bed. On occasion, there were various other requests for God to consider. Some of them were granted and some weren't, but that was okay. I looked at it as almost like not getting everything I wanted for Christmas.

But now that I'm older, problem prayer situations crop up. For example, a member of my youth group asked me to pray that she make the cheerleading squad this year. I gulped, put my hands on her shoulders and prayed that God would increase her confidence, and help her to do her best at tryouts. Not exactly what she had in mind, but it seemed to me a more fitting prayer.

In the whole scheme of things, cheerleading may not seem that important. But the scenario repeats itself in other, more serious circumstances. It happens often in hospital rooms, when I stand at bedside. "Pastor," patients often begin, "would you pray that God will make me better?" And so I gulp, take their hand, and pray that God will grant them wholeness and healing. What is requested is a prayer for healing in the most specific sense: for the operation to be a success, for the cancer to go into remission or disappear completely. What I offer is a more general prayer.

All this has started to underscore

questions for me about prayer. How specific should our prayers be? For what does God want us to pray? What is God's will for us? What assumptions can we make about God when our prayers are not answered as we would like? Although these are not easy questions, I believe that many can be explored by believing that God wants us to pray for what God would want for us. Fortunately, the Bible does give us some clues about God's intentions for us.

The first clues occur in the very beginning, in Genesis. If we look at creation before sin entered the world, we can see what God intended for people. In Eden, life is wonderful. There is plenty to eat—with one exception, of course. Men and women live in community, and there is meaningful work for them to do.

It is only after sin enters the world that the relationship between the sexes becomes complicated, work difficult, and pain and suffering part of the fabric of life. What does God want us to pray for? Those things that would make life more "Eden-like."

More hints about God's intentions occur at the very end of the Bible, in Revelation. In describing the world to come, Revelation tells us that there will be no more grief or crying or pain. God wants us to pray for the kinds of things that will occur at the end of time, when God's rule is finally accomplished.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus



performs miracles to give us a glimpse of the coming kingdom. By Jesus' actions, we find that the hungry are fed, the ill cured and the dead raised.

But it's not all that simple, is it? What about that job for which we prayed? Wouldn't that come

under the heading of "meaningful work"? And what of the times we prayed for someone to be cured, and the hoped-for healing didn't happen?

To answer these questions, I keep returning to what God wants for us as evidenced throughout the Bible. And I ask myself, Has a specific prayer not been answered, or has it just been answered in a manner different from "my way"?

Maybe we don't need to learn the types of things for which to pray, but rather a new definition of prayer. If we truly believe that prayer is dialog with God, then we can start to understand that

How specific should our prayers be? For what does God want us to pray? What is God's will for us?

prayer means listening as much as talking. We can pray, "What is your will?" And then we must listen. The purpose of prayer is not to change God's mind, but, in part, to align our minds with God.

Like most believers, I still have questions about prayer. I have a whole list of things I want to discuss with God when I see God face to face—situations in life that I wish had happened differently. And I still pray. ■

The Rev. Cheryl F. Meinschein is pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church, Stony Creek Mills, Pennsylvania. She has written Bible studies for women's groups.



Praying and Meaning It

Donna Hacker Smith



"You are out of your mind!" they told Rhoda, the maid who brought them the news that Peter was at the gate.

"Well, what did you expect?"

This question is frequently directed our way when our intentions go awry. A plan that had seemed well-made is foiled by circumstances. Or perhaps we took a chance, "went out on a limb" and fell off it.

Human beings are ever-quick to anticipate negative results. We know that the punishment will fit the crime, that every action has a reaction, and that "no good deed goes unpunished."

Why is it, then, that so often we don't expect *anything*—positive or negative—when we pray? In many cases, even faithful Christians are so skeptical of results that prayer is viewed as a last resort for desperate situations.

When we have this attitude we are in the best of company, for even the disciples were known to pray without expecting results.

Acts 12:12-17 tells of a night when the faithful had gathered to pray at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Probably they were praying for the safe deliverance of Peter, whom King Herod had imprisoned. When Peter, released by an angel of the Lord, appeared at the gate of the house, the gathered believers were skeptical, to say the least. "You are out of your mind!" they told Rhoda, the maid who brought them the

news that Peter was even then at the gate.

"Well, what did you expect?" we might well ask these believers. You prayed for Peter's release, and here he is. Why are you so surprised?

It is easy to criticize the little gathering of Christians who prayed for Peter so long ago. And yet, what do we expect when we pray? Do we pray with sincere faith that God will answer our prayers? Do we actively listen for God's answers?

One expression of God's grace and love is God's action in response to our prayers, something which occurs, often, in spite of our lack of expectations. How marvelous it is that we can trustingly place our prayers in the hands of our loving God, knowing that a response will come. We can and should expect an answer to our prayers. Our God cares; our God will act.

Once we have moved toward expectant prayer, we can also learn the next step from the house church of Acts 12. After praying expectantly, we must be open to the answer God sends our way.

Acts 12:14 tells us that the maid, Rhoda, was so overjoyed at the recognition of Peter's voice that instead of opening the gate she ran back inside to announce the news to the others! Does this also happen to us? Does God answer our prayers with a response that we do not even acknowledge because the door of our hearts is closed?

The little group of Christians at the house church in Acts 12 received exactly what they had prayed for: Peter's release. We all know, from experience, that we may not receive our preferred answer to every prayer. This truth should not lead us, however, to a cynical or helpless at-

titude. The hymn "God of Grace and God of Glory" (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 415) includes the line, "Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore." Once we have prayed with sincere faith, we should actively listen for and seek answers.

A meditation titled "On Prayer" in *Gates of Repentance*, the Reform Jewish prayer book for the Days of Awe, points out how we often fail to see the answers to prayer God provides us. It begins:

"We cannot pray to You, O God,
to banish war,
for You have filled the world
with paths to peace,
if only we would take them."

"We cannot pray to You
to end starvation,
for there is food enough for all,
if only we would share it."*

The meditation reminds us not to wait passively for the answers to our prayers, but rather to be participants in bringing God's loving responses to light and life.

Sometimes there are prayers in our hearts that we hardly dare address to God. The good news of the story in Acts 12 is that we can and should dare to pray to God and expect that, out of God's endless love and grace, an answer will come. ■

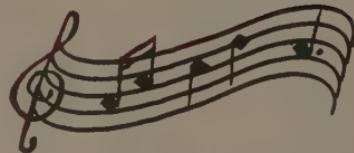
*"On Prayer" is from *Gates of Repentance*, published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, copyright © 1978. Used by permission.

Donna Hacker Smith is pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Freeport, Illinois. Her February activities include Lenten preparations and praying expectantly for the Chicago Cubs.

Prayer Life and the Lutheran Book of Worship

Paul Westermeyer

Hear my prayer, O Lord;
listen to my cry.
Keep me as the apple of your eye;
hide me in the shadow of your wings.
In righteousness I shall see you;
when I awake, your presence will give me joy.



A bookshelf in our family room holds a number of pocket-sized 19th century hymnals. One has my grandfather's name on it.

Some people keep a hymnal at home on their piano, kitchen table, desk or nightstand. Others, picking up on a custom once popular, come to church with their pocket-sized edition of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (*LBW*) and then take it home again for use during the week. Several people I know even keep hymnals in their cars!

All these customs show how hymnals can have a use beyond the church's public worship services: they can help to link our personal devotional lives to public services. The *LBW* is an especially rich resource in this regard. Here are six ways the *LBW* can be used as a source for our prayer and devotional lives.

Hymns As Prayers

◆ Hymns themselves are poetic, devotional material, in many cases actual prayers. This truth might be more obvious if they were printed as poetry, verse by verse. In the United States, however, we have chosen to interline hymns with the music so they can more easily be sung with

their tunes. In truth, almost all hymns can be used for meditation.

And we can commit hymns to memory. That sometimes happens without our realizing it: we sing hymns or use them devotionally until one day, perhaps when we are sick or in despair or poised for celebration, we find them in our memory banks. Then they become sources for consolation or joy. The same is true for parts of the liturgy, especially those parts that are themselves hymns—like “Glory to God in the Highest,” “Worthy Is Christ,” “Holy, Holy, Holy,” or “Lamb of God.”

Praying the Psalms

◆ The Psalms provide source material for many hymns and form the hymnal of the Bible. Christians have employed them as key elements of daily prayer for centuries. St. Benedict split them up so all 150 would be used weekly.

Almost all the 150 Psalms are in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, pages 215-289. If you want to use them daily in a fashion that relates to the church year and the rhythm of day and night, follow the chart on page 178—a help that people are often surprised to find.

The Psalms are quite remarkable. They contain humanity's ferocity and finesse, the height and the depth of human emotion, the consolation of Psalm 23 and the despair of Psalm 22, and much more—all against the backdrop of God's gracious and steadfast love. The Psalms are not glitzy stuff, and they wear exceedingly well, making more and more sense as one is sunk deeply into the joys and sorrows of living. That may help explain why they are used so much—in public worship and in Christians' private prayer lives.

Guide to Scripture

◆ A full prayer and devotional life includes reading from the Bible, and the *LBW* is a remarkable guide here. If you want ordered Bible readings, the *LBW* provides a daily lectionary (list of readings) that begins on page 179. It gives an Old Testament, epistle and gospel reading for each day of a two-year period. You can use one, two or all three of the readings. (Note that Year One begins in Advent of even years.) These readings work through books, or portions of books, of the Bible day by day.

A Treasury of Prayers

◆ In the front of the *LBW*, beginning on page 42—after the prayers and readings for the church year—there is a treasury of prayers. The heading for each prayer describes its topic. These “Petitions, Intercessions and Thanksgivings” bring together a wealth of devotional material. None of us need be at a loss for prayer with this section in the *LBW*.

Special Uses and Services

◆ One can use hymns, psalms, readings and prayers in any number of ways: by themselves or in combinations; in disciplined sequence; or with Luther's morning and evening prayers that are incorporated into the “Suffrages” on pages 163 (morning prayer) and 166 (evening prayer).

For centuries Christians have marked the rhythm of day and night with services of morning and evening prayer. These services in the *LBW* may be used in a shorter form for families or small groups, or in a longer version for the church's large public gatherings. In the *LBW*, both

Morning Prayer (or "Matins," pages 131) and Evening Prayer (or "Vespers," page 142) have tiny circles in the left margins. Those circles suggest which parts of the services to use for shorter versions. A leader can choose the psalm and lesson from the listings on pages 178 and the lectionary on page 179.

Compline

◆ Prayer at the Close of the Day, or "Compline" (page 154), is another service for those who want devotional material before they go to bed. It is an ancient service that has become popular in some school chapels and dormitories, at camps and among groups in some churches. Its quiet, confessional, trusting tone reaches the heart.

The *Lutheran Book of Worship* offers rich possibilities for our devotional lives. It can help to lead us into the Scriptures and the treasury of the church's prayer life so that, as Heinrich Albert wrote in the *LBW*'s hymn 266, "[our] life and conversation [may] be directed by [God's] Word." ■



Paul Westermeyer is professor of church music at Luther Northwestern Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. Dr. Westermeyer previously taught at Elmhurst College in Illinois

and served churches in Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland and Ohio.



Over a century ago thousands of immigrants seeking opportunity were pouring off boats docking in New York harbor. But for many their dreams of a better life were crushed by squalid housing, unfair labor practices, and inadequate schools. Disturbed by these conditions, Mary Ellen James, President of the Women's Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church, issued a call for a day to be set aside in 1887 for prayers for home missions "when there shall be confession of individual and national sins with offerings that fitly express the contrition." In this call to prayer she linked prayer with meaningful action.

Mary Ellen James' call to prayer and action is the mustard seed that has grown into the worldwide women's ecumenical movement now called "World Day of Prayer" (WDP). In the 105 years since that first day of prayer, Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox women have formed WDP national committees in 170 countries. These national committees are responsible for the translation, printing, and distribution of an ecumenical service conducted annually on

A Friday in March

World Day of Prayer

Eileen King

the first Friday of March in tens of thousands of localities.

Each year a theme for World Day of Prayer is developed and prepared by women of a different country. This means that the same WDP service is used by all participants in scores of languages. It also means that the faith, hope, joy, concerns and sufferings of the people in one country are lifted up in prayer that year by their sisters and brothers everywhere.



"O God, how wonderful are thy works. . . . We lift up our hearts to thee." Psalm 104

The vision of World Day of Prayer has been shared woman to woman across neighborhoods, countries, denominations. Engaging neighbors and friends in a World Day of Prayer

service is often a first step taken on the road to ecumenism and mutual understanding. The only way to account for World Day of Prayer's broad ecumenical and international appeal is to recognize the influence of the Holy Spirit and the power of women together, and to affirm that prayer and action have an imponderable influence in the world.

It takes five years to develop a WDP service. Yet recent themes have been surprisingly timely. In 1990, when Eastern Europe was undergoing dramatic changes, the WDP theme was "A Better Tomorrow: Justice for All," prepared by women of Czechoslovakia.

Last March we joined the women of Kenya in a prayer drawn from the theme "On the Journey Together." The road ahead for the women of Kenya, indeed for most women, is difficult, often dangerous. Yet, God is ever with us. God, who is so alert to what we need, asks us to see with greater clarity who is walking beside us and what it is they carry.

The 1992 WDP service, "Living Wisely with Creation," has been prepared jointly by women of Austria, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Switzerland. When we gather together on March 6, they will ask us to see that God not only gave us the gift of creation but also the meaning-

ful task of being co-workers. Through the stories of four women, we will be shown how the hopeful rebuilding of Europe has also led to serious difficulties. We will be invited to examine how the biblical story of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) is often repeated in our own localities.

Yet even as we confront the complex and difficult issues that plague our environment, we will not be left with a sense of destruction. Hope can be found in Proverbs 8. With wisdom we can become responsible co-workers in creation. Then we will be able to offer authentic praise and thanksgiving to God from whom all blessings flow.



"Huge Garden with Birds," an etching by Jutta Votteler, offers a vision of God's wonderful creation.

The 1992 WDP theme provides an excellent opportunity to reinforce the close connection between prayer and action, between commitment to change at the local level and its impact on the global scene. During the WDP service all will be encouraged to see what practical changes they can make in their lives so that natural resources are preserved. Every-

one will be asked to formulate their own actions into a pledge. Those pledges will then be collected after the service and sent to the United Nations delegates that represent participants. A United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development is to be held in Brazil in June 1992.

Many of you reading this are among the women who help make each first Friday of March a World Day of Prayer. If you are already involved in WDP at your local level, please know that your support is essential and appreciated. If you are learning about World Day of Prayer for the first time, then please consider these words as a "woman to woman" invitation from all the women who have ever been part of this global ecumenical movement. Circle March 6th on your 1992 calendar.

To receive information on how to celebrate World Day of Prayer in your community, write to the United States WDP National Committee, Mary Cline Detrick, Church Women United, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 812, New York, New York 10115. Write Eileen King at the same address for information on the international coordination of World Day of Prayer. ■

Eileen King is executive director of the international committee for World Day of Prayer. A native New Yorker and a "Vatican II Catholic," she is delighted to be able to work with women on the connection between informed prayer and prayerful action.



Learning from others

Toward a Rich Prayer Life

Eva Rogness

Our Lutheran heritage has indeed given us a rich prayer life, but we can expand our understanding even further as we learn from the traditions of our Jewish, Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox neighbors. Hear how some others "do prayer."

lament

A strong tradition among the Jews is the prayer of *lament*. In times of suffering the Jews cry out to the Lord. We Lutherans often tend to be very "proper" in our prayers, rather than pouring out what is in our hearts, even the bitterness or resentment we might be feeling. Read the Psalms. The authors of Psalms were honest with God in expressing their suffering, and even their questions about God.

Jewish prayers often recount what God has done in the past. There is great strength and comfort in retelling God's action among us. Laments are thus tempered with the assurances that the God who acted for us in the past will also prevail for us in the future.

Try writing a psalm. Include verses of lament from your own life, while recounting what God has done for you.

disciplined Prayer

Catholics often practice *disciplined prayer*, prayers that are repeated, often at regular times. Some Lutherans shy away from the practice of disciplined prayer, fearing it may become automatic and monotonous. However, disciplined prayer can be a resource for a meaningful prayer life. We can, of course, pray anytime, but setting aside certain times ensures that we're regularly connected to God. Praying the same words each time allows opportunity for each word to become meaningful.

Many of us pray regularly at mealtimes and bedtimes.

Medieval monks prayed up to seven times a day, from matins early in the morning to vespers late at night. Devout Muslims interrupt any activity when the muezzins call out the five times of daily prayer.

In the hospital I have heard people say, "I don't pray anymore, because I can't feel God near me." That is precisely the time that disciplined prayer is of great help. We may feel depleted and unable to pray, but discipline ushers us into the presence of God, where God can reach us. In those times we can't pray, we have the promise that God's spirit will pray for us "with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).

Meditation

Many Catholic religious orders have developed a rich spirituality through *meditation*. "Be still, and know that I am God!" the psalmist tells us (Psalm 46:10). Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:1-3 speak of those who "meditate day and night." Some people meditate as an experienced leader walks them through guided imagery. Others meditate alone, reflecting on their relationship to God and the meaning of their life. Some people pick out a phrase or an idea on which to meditate. The emphasis is on *listening*, allowing God's spirit to work within us.

Contemplation

Closely related to meditation is *contemplation*, a rich tradition of both Catholics and the Orthodox. This kind of prayer uses few words. One meditates "on" or "about" *something*, but one can *contemplate* by centering one's consciousness on God. Many Christians use the "Jesus Prayer," simply repeating the name of Jesus in one's mind, clearing the mind of everything else and letting the person and presence of Jesus flood their whole being. The Jesus Prayer is based on such verses as Zechariah 13:9, "They will call on my name, and I will answer them." Many describe this kind of prayer as a "mystical experience," entering directly into the presence of God. Those who practice contemplation say that one needs to spend 30 minutes to one hour a day in order to enter into the prayer fully.

Praying the Scripture

We usually read the Bible to learn from it. In a sense, however, *Scriptures* are God's love letters to us, and it is through

them that God speaks to us. As you read or meditate on certain Bible passages, do so with the prayer in your soul that asks God to speak to you.

In order to pray Scripture: (1) sit in silence, (2) empty our mind, (3) read a selected portion of Scripture slowly three times, (4) pause five minutes between each reading, (5) then close the Bible and let the words of the Scriptures speak to you over and over again. You may be astonished how alive the verses will become for you.

Communal Prayer

We pray together in worship and in our family circles, as well as with friends. Many Lutherans are most comfortable with passive communal prayer, in which one person leads and the rest are quiet. This is not so for many from the Baptist, African-American, Assemblies of God, and other traditions.

Last week I stood by the bedside of a dying African-American woman, holding hands with her and her family. The main theme of the prayer was picked up *alternately* by each person present, while the rest *simultaneously* added variations to the theme. The prayer was structured like a Bach piano invention, the theme interwoven. We felt closely connected to each other, as if we were one body storming the gates of heaven. Each person participated in the prayer—physically, emotionally and spiritually. It was an immensely powerful and moving experience.

Pray without Ceasing

People newly in love think about their beloved constantly throughout the day. Maybe that is what Paul meant by "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Our spiritual life is deepened when we realize that God permeates every aspect of our being and every moment of our existence. The awareness of God being with us always is a kind of prayer, prayer without ceasing.

Prayer can be a spiritual adventure for every Christian. Sharing the experiences of others can offer direction and dimensions to our personal prayer life. ■

Dava Rogness, St. Paul, Minnesota, is staff chaplain at Abbott Northwestern Hospital. With her husband, the Rev. Michael Rogness, she coauthored sessions 9 through 12 of the 1991 Bible study in *Lutheran Woman Today*.



*"Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted."* Matthew 5:4

All God's Children Got a Robe

Barbara Jurgensen

It was a cold morning in early February. The ground glistened with frost from an overnight temperature near zero.

Evelyn was filling in at the church office because she was tired of being alone in the house since her husband died. She wasn't sleeping well, she wasn't interested in eating; it was a difficult time.

Suddenly she heard a loud pounding on the office door and went to answer it. There stood a man in an old overcoat held together by one broken button. He thrust his bare hands into the two torn pockets, introducing himself as Ted.

Shivering, Ted asked if the church had any food. As she handed him a bag, he began to dig through it.

"Canned grapefruit—good; tuna—good; canned corn—good; box of macaroni and cheese—no good; box of oatmeal—no good." He handed her the two offending boxes.

"What's wrong with the macaroni and the oatmeal?" she asked.

"Don't have any way to cook 'em."
"No way to cook them? Where do you live?"

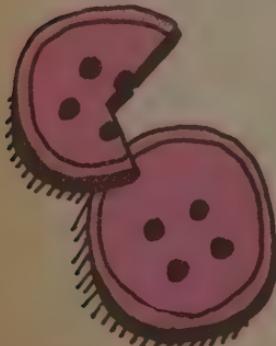
"Well, there's this woman who lives in a big house with a garage. Every night I wait till I see her turn out her bedroom light, then I sneak into the garage and curl up in old carpets."

"Is the garage heated?"
Ted shook his head.
"You're sleeping in an unheated garage in this cold?"

"It's better than what my friend Bill has—he sleeps in a shipping crate down by the tracks and you never know who might be going by. I prefer the privacy of the garage." He thanked her and left.

She resumed her typing, but couldn't get Ted out of her mind. "Why do people have to live like that?" she asked herself, almost aloud. Her friend Sue Anne had been asking her to visit the overnight shelter for the homeless that Sue Anne's church had just opened. Evelyn had been too involved in her own situation to want to go, but now something seemed to be pulling her toward the shelter.

She phoned Sue Anne, who signed



her up to work the next Tuesday night at the church shelter.

As she entered Sue Anne's church Tuesday evening the basement was warm and smelled of coffee brewing. Evelyn pitched in to offer sandwiches, coffee, juice and cookies to about 20 men and 20 women. She was glad to see Ted there and greeted him warmly. Two students from a nearby seminary rolled out sleeping mats, the men in one room, the women in the other. When everyone had found a place, taken off their coats and shoes and stretched out, the students picked up their guitars and began singing some comfortable old songs: "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and "All God's Children Got Shoes."

Three of the women of the congregation mended the guest's worn garments. One put new buttons on Ted's overcoat and sewed up the torn pockets.

Ted watched as the stitches were taken in his beloved coat. When it was finished, he laid it carefully alongside his mat and stretched out beside it. Evelyn wondered if this might be the first night in a long time that he hadn't had to sleep in it. Ted fell asleep, his right hand clutching one of the sleeves.

The students kept playing and singing as the tired people drifted off to sleep:

**I got a robe,
You got a robe,
All God's children got a robe.
When I get to heaven,
Gonna put on my robe,
I'm gonna shout all over God's heaven.**

Soon the sounds of sleeping blended with the music.

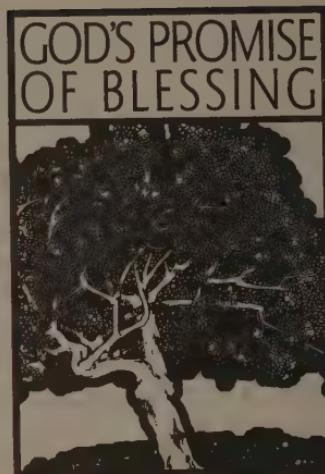


Evelyn sat down next to Sue Anne. It had felt good to work in the church office in the morning and now to help in the shelter, she thought. It was a comfort to be of use to others.

Maybe, she thought to herself, maybe the Father *does* know how to give comfort to those who mourn, after all . . . maybe our Father is waiting to clothe us with a new robe, a robe of sharing God's love, a robe of joy. ■

Barbara Jurgensen, a former pastor in inner-city Chicago, is assistant professor of ministry and contextual education at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. This is the second in a series of articles based on the Beatitudes.

Session 2 God on the Loose



Judith A. VanOsdol-Hansen
Robert J. LaRiviere

Bible Basis: Matthew 3:1—4:25

Study Text: Matthew 3:1-17

The Matthew 3 text on the baptism of Jesus raises many questions. Why does Jesus need to be baptized? Just what is the “righteousness” he wishes to fulfill (verse 15)? What does it mean that “the heavens were opened” (verse 16) at the baptism of Jesus? As we focus on this text, may we discover that Jesus’ baptism witnesses to God’s blessing in a deeper way than we might have imagined.

Opening Prayer



Holy Lord of life, just as God spoke at the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan, so speak to us now with your Word, that we may be filled with your life-giving power and presence. Wash away our sins so that we might serve you and all people. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

*Understanding the Word***1**

To gain an overview of the text, fill in the chart provided below. Use a simple phrase to summarize the content of each part of the text.

TEXT	SUMMARY
3:1-3	
3:4-6	
3:7-10	
3:11-12	
3:13-17	

The text for the baptism of Jesus begins with John the Baptizer. John is no ordinary preacher. The gospels speak of John as someone whose clothing, message and manner were unique. Even his diet, we read in verse 4, is unusual. John is the one sent to ‘prepare the way’ (verse 3) for Christ, echoing the Old Testament prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 40:3).

2

Read Malachi 3:1-4 and 4:5-6, at the very end of the Old Testament. Matthew’s gospel identifies John the Baptist with the prophet whose coming is promised at the end of the Old Testament. Why do you think Matthew makes this connection?

John and Jesus have much in common. Both speak similar messages to the people (see Malachi 3:1-2 and Matthew 4:17). Neither has been “approved” by the religious authorities; in fact they both condemn the Pharisees and Sadducees who are the religious leaders of the Jewish community. These religious authorities regard both John and Jesus with suspicion.

3

Imagine a scene: you are a member of a well-established church in town. One day a traveling evangelist sets up a tent just outside the city limits and begins preaching, drawing huge crowds—including members of your own congregation.

This evangelist sharply criticizes your pastor and other respected leaders of your community. What is the danger in this situation? Does God's word—or does the church—need protection from such a roving prophet or preacher? What should your pastor do?

Both Jesus and John are seen as threats to the established religious community. What do you think is threatening about John's words in Matthew 3:7-10? What is the source of the Pharisees' security (verse 9)? What does John demand from them instead (verse 8)?

4

Who would you rather have join your church—a shabby-looking and confrontational person like John the Baptist, or a seemingly respectable, sophisticated person with a position of leadership in your community? The question is almost rhetorical. But, going deeper, just how does our faith shape our attitudes toward those who might wish to join (or shake up) our fellowship? What kind of picture of Jesus does John paint in verses 11-12?

5

Read verses 13-17. Why do you think Jesus, who is without sin, asks to be baptized with a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? What does John's question in verse 14 show about his understanding of Jesus?

6

Jesus' reply—the first words spoken by Jesus in the book of Matthew—reveals the will of God: "for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness" (verse 15). What do you think the phrase "fulfill all righteousness" might mean?

In our study text from Matthew 3, righteousness relates to the covenant established between God and the chosen people. Jesus fulfills God's righteousness by identifying himself with the sinner, beginning with a baptism for repentance he does not need and ending with a death he does not deserve.

In the baptism for repentance, Jesus is led by the Spirit. Throughout the gospel narrative, as in 4:1 (the temptation in the desert), the Spirit leads Jesus to places we would never expect to find a holy person, let alone the Son of God. The "righteousness of God," as personified in Christ, completes the covenant God initiated with the children of Israel.

Christ fulfills God's promise and becomes a living, breathing blessing. God reveals absolute love for all people when Jesus stands with the sinners and outcasts to receive John's baptism. In doing so, Jesus becomes a visible sign of God's grace.

7

Matthew 3:16 depicts a most amazing scene: "Suddenly the heavens were opened." There are very few places in the Bible where this phrase is found. One is in Genesis, chapters 6–9, where the heavens were opened (7:11) and rain fell upon the earth, bringing great destruction. Now, in Matthew 3:16, the heavens again open.

Instead of destruction, however, we find salvation—as the Spirit of God comes down, and the voice of God confirms that this Jesus is indeed the beloved son, with whom God is well pleased (verse 17). How would you describe what the Bible means when the Bible says "the heavens were opened"?

Interpreting the Word

A New Testament professor was leading a Bible study on the baptism of Jesus. The professor gave a traditional interpretation—that “the heavens opened” means that through Jesus Christ we now have access to God.

But one young student replied: “No, that is not what it means at all; this means that God now has access to us!” In other words, God is “on the loose” in our world and in our very lives.

We often hear people speak as if God were “up there” somewhere, far removed from our daily existence and experience. Yet the Bible text suggests that God, in Christ, is no longer “up there” somewhere far away, but right here, now, among us even as we speak.

8

What do you think the phrase “God is with us” might mean? Have you ever been particularly aware of God’s presence? When and where?

Matthew’s gospel says that Jesus is Emmanuel—which means “God is with us.” From the start, the gospel narrative identifies Jesus in this way (Matthew 1:23).

Look at the baptism text in Matthew 3 and the crucifixion account in 27:51, where the temple curtain is torn in two from top to bottom, allowing access to the “Holy of Holies,” or the Holy of Holies’ access to us.

It is in Christ, and in him crucified, that we are now able to “see” God. Christ’s suffering and death on the cross is God’s ultimate revelation—we now know God, and have seen God, as Christ lifted himself up to die for us.

Look next at Matthew 18:20. According to this verse, under what circumstances does Jesus promise to be with us? See also Matthew 28:20. Again, in what way does Jesus promise to be with us? Of what practical use could these verses be in living out our faith?

9

Have you ever felt uneasy in a bank or department store where security cameras watch your every move? Do you ever get that same uneasy feeling when, during the “Brief Order

for Confession and Forgiveness," we confess our sins to "Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid" (Lutheran Book of Worship, page 56)? Under what circumstances does God's presence make people afraid? Under what circumstances does God's presence bring comfort and strength?

Living the Word

10

What does Jesus' baptism reveal about him? Not only does Jesus seek a baptism for repentence, but God's voice clearly commands Jesus' action. Why do you think God is "well pleased" (3:17) with Jesus at the time of his baptism?

Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan reveals that the deepest blessing of God becomes our own. For from the beginning of his ministry all the way to the cross, Jesus is on our side. He blesses us, heals us, and fulfills God's promises with a love so strong that not even death can break it.

Though God knows all our sins, the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is stronger than sin and death, makes us once again right with God.

11

Might there be a part of your life that has been "hiding" from Christ's love and forgiveness, a part that seems too far removed from the work of the Holy Spirit to be brought into the light of Christ? What does it mean to surrender ourselves completely to God's grace?

Remember, God is "on the loose," working God's will in the world and in our lives. "God with us" means that God will never abandon us. God keeps the promises made to the chosen people in the covenant, and Christ fulfills this covenant.

Thanks to God's gift in Christ, we are now free from the worry of "working our way into heaven," and we are free to serve our neighbors, work for peace and justice in the world around us, and

live lives of hope and healing in a world yearning for God's love. It has often been said to "be careful of the life you lead—it may be the only gospel some people ever read."

12

May our lives, passions, hobbies, language, and labors express the blessed love that is ours in Jesus Christ. Ours is to be an attitude of repentance and constant expectation of God's mercy.

As a tree is shaped by prevailing winds, or a stone is smoothed by ocean waves, so God shapes us through repentance and forgiveness until we are made like Jesus. How might this "shaping" work of God change our attitudes toward people?

Looking Ahead

In Session 3 we begin the passion narrative in Matthew 26. We will trace the journey to Jerusalem and the cross—seeking to follow Jesus on our own journey of faith.

The Rev. Judith VanOsdol-Hansen is pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chicago, Illinois; the Rev. Robert LaRiviere is pastor of Christ Lutheran Church in Schoenersville, Pennsylvania.

"God's Promise of Blessing: A Study of the Gospel of Matthew" is prepared by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America under the direction of the Rev. Ivis LaRiviere-Mestre, Editor. Contributing Editor: the Rev. Nancy Koester. Copyright © 1992 Augsburg Fortress. May not be reproduced without permission.

Comments and questions relating to the Bible study should be sent to the Rev. Karen Battle, Director for Educational Resources, Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189.

A resource book (code 2-9225; \$3.95) and leader guide (code 2-9226; \$3.50) are available to supplement this Bible study. Also available: "1992 Daily Bible Readings" (code 2-9238; \$1.95/12; \$13.95/100) and a 4 x 7-inch "1992 Blessings Calendar," with prayer thoughts in English and Spanish, tied to specific beatitudes (code 2-9212; \$1.00). Order from your nearest Augsburg Fortress location, or call 1-800-328-4648.

Sometimes it seems that no matter how we pray, it isn't right. We don't say the right words, or pray often enough. We pray only when we need something desperately. We are tongue-tied pray-ers in public, and we daydream when praying alone. We promise to pray for people but so often don't. We rattle through the Lord's Prayer, not praying for an instant. We even fall asleep while we're praying.

Like faith itself, prayer offers us the conundrum of being both very difficult and very easy. Though most of us may know a "superstar pray-er," we must not lose sight of the fact that all of us can do it well enough for what it's for. For there are no prizes for praying, unless we count the unspeakable good of being in touch with God, a blessing available to all who pray.

I am not a stellar pray-er, and I fall into all the temptations above and a few more. Over the years, however, I have stumbled onto some hints that help me pray.

What words to use: It doesn't matter if you pray in your own words, or adopt those of others. Sometimes, however, only your own words seem right. If you have been asked to lead prayer aloud, you may wish to write your own prayer beforehand. *Ex corde* ("from the heart") prayer is not necessarily from the top of your head.

At other times, using prayerbooks or prayers found in the liturgy may give you new insights and strength, as well as a way to talk to God. Sometimes the power of liturgical prayer can steal the chaos from sorrows, or bring ecstasy to celebrations. I always know that I have come to the nub of Christmas when during the Christmas liturgy we borrow the ancient church's words and pray "that, beholding the God made visible, we may be drawn to love the God whom we cannot see" (*LBW Minister's Desk Edition*, p. 246). The words give me goosebumps. And, somehow, it is easier to give up to God someone who has died, with the words of the poignant prayer in the burial liturgy: "Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend your servant . . ." (*LBW*, p. 211).

Hints for the Practical Pray-er

Karen Melang



Sometimes only
your own words
seem right.

Sometimes there are no words for prayer. The anguish is so deep and the future so full of dread that we are speechless. However alone we may feel at those times, God has no intention of abandoning us to the powers of evil. It is then that the Spirit prays for us "with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).

"Name prayers" help me pray at those times. Simply pray the name of the person who concerns you. You need not ask for anything specific—likely you don't even know what it would take to make things right. Bring the person to God by name. Shout the name, scream it, whisper it, say it with care or anger or both. Give the person and the situation to God.

If you are visual rather than verbal, you may find strength in "picture prayers." Picture Jesus' arm around you, looking at you with love. Give your concerns to God in vigorous images that need no words.



Let daily events
cue your
prayer.
Washing dishes,
showering or
flossing your
teeth . . .

When to pray: Most of us do not come close to praying "without ceasing." Still, we want a prayer life more vibrant than "Come, Lord Jesus" and praying in church. We want a prayer life where God is more than a cosmic candy machine, dispensing goodies at our bidding.

I have found that labeling everyday experiences as prayer cues is helpful. Whenever I hear a siren, for instance, I pray for the people and situation involved. Then I pray for those hungry and homeless and for all whose emergencies seem permanent, but for whom no siren ever sounds. Pick an occasional event—insomnia, a birthday, payday—and let it be a cue to pray.

Let daily events cue your prayer, too. Washing dishes, showering or flossing your teeth all demand time but not much concentration and offer opportunities for prayer. Exercising often gives us "mind time" when we can both pray and listen for God's voice.

Then pray: Relentlessly. Watch tenacious Abraham bargaining for Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:22-33) and the persistent woman whose neighbor, the judge, answered her before she drove him crazy (Luke 18:1-8). Persistence is evidently God's idea of praise. Keep on praying. Nothing could please God more. ■

Karen Melang, a trained deaconess, is a communicator at the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension and a regular "Give Us This Day" columnist. She is married and has two children, ages 13 and 16.

A Father Looks at Prayer

Jay Trygstad

"It's a girl!" the doctor announced, and suddenly everything in our lives changed.

Our expenses, our schedules, our priorities were all instantly rearranged by a 6 lb., 9 oz. little person who didn't even have a name yet. Parenthood brought with it both painful trials and wonderful joys. One unexpected benefit was how becoming a father helped me to appreciate better my heavenly Father, and to understand my relationship with God in a new way.

I'm crazy about my kids. With no provocation at all I have been known to display pictures of my children to perfect strangers. Can our heavenly Father be any less a doting parent? Hasn't God told us in so many ways, "I have called you by name, you are mine. . . . you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you" (Isaiah 43:1b, 4, New Revised Standard Version)? Sociologist Tony Campolo paints a picture of a God who carries a photo of each of us, and when the angels are off their guard, probably flips out a wallet for the 500th time and asks, "Have you seen my children? Aren't they wonderful?"

We know intuitively that God is a holy, righteous and all-powerful creator. Jesus came to reveal to us the secret heart of "Our Father who art in heaven." Jesus taught us that God is no "stuffed shirt" who must be for-

mally addressed only in King James English. On the other hand, as Keith Miller and Bruce Larson point out in their book *The Edge of Adventure* (Word, 1974), neither is God a simple-minded child who will be humored by repeating "some little jingle that rhymes" at mealtime.

Jesus shows us the God who is "Abba," Daddy, who loves us and craves a personal, even intimate, relationship with his children. Our heavenly Father wants us to share with him, as openly and honestly as



**Becoming a father
helped me better
appreciate my heavenly
Father, and understand
my relationship with God
in a new way.**



**Jesus told us, ". . . it is
your Father's good
pleasure to give you the
kingdom" (Luke 12:32).
No doubt God enjoys
the giving . . .**

we can, every problem, every fear, every hope, every dream. As Peter counsels, "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

When our oldest was two, we bought an "assemble-it-yourself" swing set. Since I'm no "Handy Andy," it was a real labor of love to put that set together. For two full days I struggled to interpret directions that would have baffled a mechanical engineer. I inserted things backwards and upside down, and more than once gouged myself with a screwdriver. Just as I finished setting up the swing, my daughter came flying into the backyard yelling, "Yaaaa Daddy!!" In that moment, it was all worth it. I received such joy from giving her that gift.

I think that's how it must be when God answers our prayers. Jesus told us, ". . . it is your Father's good plea-

sure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). No doubt God enjoys the giving more than we enjoy the receiving. Too often we act as if God is a cosmic Ebenezer Scrooge before whom we have to grovel and plead to wrench away gifts.

More likely James is closer to the truth when he writes, "You do not have, because you do not ask" (4:2). Jesus asks, "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:9-11).

Being a father is sometimes a mixed blessing. With the joy there is also pain. When I was still a thin-skinned new father, our one-year-old woke up crying in the middle of the night. As a dutiful parent, I awoke from a deep sleep. In hope I looked over at my wife, who was, alas, pretending to be asleep. By an act of sheer willpower, I sat up, put my feet on the floor, and took a step in the direction of my distressed child. Immediately I jammed my little toe against the metal bedframe and felt incredible pain shoot through my body. I lunged forward, catching my shin on the sharp edge of an open dresser drawer. For love's sake alone, I somehow limped painfully into the baby's room. My beloved daughter took one look at me, and at the top of her lungs cried out, "MOMMY!!"

The feeling of rejection of that moment hurt much more than the toe and the shin combined. Perhaps that is a taste of how our heavenly Father, who has paid such a price for us, feels when we look past him and cry out

other people, other loyalties, other securities. Surely it must break Father's heart when we allow our time with God to be usurped "more urgent" priorities. And yet in when "we are faithless, he remains faithful—" (2 Timothy 2:13) or more willing to hear than we to say.

No doubt the hardest time in parents' lives is when they have to say no to the pleading of their child. One night after prayers, songs, hugs and kisses, I laid our baby down in her bed, covered her up nice and snugly, and tiptoed out of the room. No sooner had I closed the door behind me than her tears began. She cried and cried, and when she called out "Dada, Dada!" I thought my heart would melt.

I wanted desperately to burst into the room, pick her up in my arms and comfort her, but I knew she needed to learn to go to sleep on her own. The most painful part was knowing that my little girl couldn't understand why I didn't respond to her cries. She didn't know I was standing less than three feet away, my hand on the doorknob, my ear at the door, my heart about to break with misery sob.

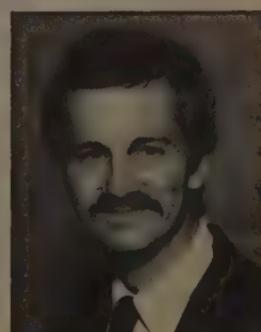
There are times in my life when I do not sense God's presence, and I know my fervent prayers are not even getting past the ceiling. In those times it helps me to think of my heavenly Father, standing just outside the door, hand on the knob, ear to the door listening intently to every prayer, with a Father's heart yearning to reach down and rescue me, comfort me, comfort me. But for reasons beyond my understanding, God must be silent for a time. As the psalmist writes:



**At times when I do not
sense God's presence
it helps me to think of
my heavenly Father,
standing just outside
the door, yearning
to comfort me.**

*You have kept count of my tossings;
put my tears in your bottle.
Are they not in your record?...
This I know, that God is for me.
In God, whose word I praise,
in the Lord, whose word I praise,
in God I trust; I am not afraid...
Psalm 56:8-11. ■*

The Rev. Jay Trygstad lives in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, with his wife Susan and their two incredibly cute daughters, Anika and Julia. He serves as copastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Schaumburg, Illinois.





Postures for Prayer

Constance L. Beck

My curiosity was aroused by a question from a "unchurched" woman in the neighborhood. Her children attended the Sunday school of the congregation I served as parish worker, and I had been called to ask if I could visit their home. Yes, the mother would be happy to have me visit, and then she asked, "What does your church teach children to fold their hands and bow their heads when they pray?"

No one had asked me that before; but I remembered hearing even as a child that we fold our hands to keep them out of mischief when we pray, and we bow our heads and close our eyes to shut out distractions and show respect for God.

"Does the Bible say you should do that?" the woman asked. I had to admit I didn't know, but since I was fresh out of college with a major in religion, I was sure I could find an answer before I went to visit her. My ensuing search and study of the Bible taught me many things and has kept me interested in the subject during the 40 years since that conversation.

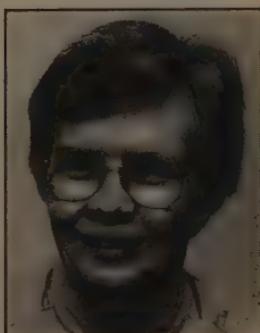
I have not found instructions in the Bible on what position to assume when praying, but there are many descriptions of how people prayed. For example, when King Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple, he first stood and then knelt, with his hands spread out toward heaven (2 Chronicles 6:12-13). In 2 Samuel 7:18 we find that King David "sat before the Lord" when he prayed. Elijah bowed down upon the earth (1 Kings 18:42), while Ezra fell on his knees and spread out his hands to the Lord when praying (Ezra 9:5).

In the New Testament we find several instances of people standing in the temple when they prayed. Before performing certain miracles, Jesus is described as looking upward to heaven, or simply upward, and praying. Yet when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane just before his betrayal, he threw himself on the ground (Matthew 26:39) and knelt down (Luke 22:41). After his farewell sermon to the Ephesians, Paul and his listeners knelt down and prayed together (Acts 20:36).

All of this tells us nothing about folding hands or closing eyes when we pray, because the Bible is not a rule book for prayer. Helpful customs develop, and often we do what we learned in childhood, even though we may not know why. Varying postures of prayer are observable in Christian congregations at worship. Ministers or assisting ministers who lead us in worship may raise their hands in prayer, fold them, or put them together in the familiar praying hands position—palms together, fingers pointed up. The people in various Lutheran congregations sit, stand and/or kneel when they pray. In some churches the worshipers stand and raise their hands heavenward when they pray. Some congregations may use incense to symbolize the rising of our prayers to God, and to engage the sense of well in worship. The beautiful Service of Evening Prayer *Lutheran Book of Worship* includes singing most of Psalm 134, with the refrain, "Let my prayer rise before you as incense; the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (145). [See front cover of this issue for an artist's interpretation of this.—ED.] Yet, some worshipers might be shocked if incense were actually used while that psalm is sung.

Does it make any difference to God what position we assume when we pray together? Probably not. Are those who kneel in prayer more devout or sincere than those who stand or sit? I doubt it. Most who talk to God in prayer many times during a day have a pattern for personal devotions. Sometimes a change of pattern, such as kneeling or standing instead of sitting, can give new vigor to our prayer life. Because of the weakness of our human nature we often need "props" to help us stay in prayer, and these props can include such things as closing our eyes, bowing our heads, or other physical actions. To consider only one way of praying as the correct one, however, is to harm ourselves and anyone who prays differently than we do. We know God hears us no matter how we pray. ■

*instance L. Beck, a member of Lutheran Church of the Resurrection in St. Paul, Minnesota, enjoys both retirement and free-lance writing and editing. From 1979 through 1987, she edited Scope, one of the predecessor magazines to *Lutheran Woman Today*.*



Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Groenewold

◆ Churches play peacemaking role in Madagascar

The Malagasy Lutheran Church and other Christian churches in that island country have worked to bring about dialog between the government and the opposition coalition in efforts to avert civil war. In an attempt to remain neutral, the Lutheran church did not condone actions by either side in the dispute, the Rev. Benjamin Rabenorolahy, president of the Malagasy Lutheran Church, wrote to the Lutheran World Federation. Churches are also holding prayer meetings for the nation.

Bless the Malagasy Lutherans as they work for peace.

◆ Columbus Quincentenary offers renewal and reflection

This year as the Columbus Quincentenary is celebrated ELCA members have an opportunity for learning and reflection. The 1991 ELCA Church-wide Assembly declared 1992 a year of "remembrance, repentance and renewal." ELCA members are called upon to learn more about the heritage and history of Native Americans. The ELCA Commission for Multicultural Ministries and Women of the ELCA have information on alternative celebrations.

Eternal God, lead us to celebrate the gifts and cultures of all people.

◆ Environment, sexuality and inclusivity up for study

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations are urged to discuss study documents and give input to task-force groups developing three social statements: on the environment; sexuality; and race, ethnicity and culture. Study guides are available from the ELCA Division for Church in Society. In preparing its social statements, the ELCA seeks wide participation from its members.

Guide our deliberations, O God of wisdom, as new social statements are crafted.

◆ New liturgy book for Lutherans in Brazil

Brazilian Lutherans have a new liturgy book. The General Council of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil authorized the full liturgy with music, titled *Celebrations of the People of God*. While influenced by worship books of other Lutheran churches, it is thoroughly Brazilian product.

Risen Savior, thank you for liturgies that allow us to praise you in our own languages.

Remember to add to your daily prayer list people and issues in the local, national and international news.

Sonia C. Groenewold is features editor of The Lutheran.

REVIEWS

You Can Make a Difference

Marlene Wilson

Volunteer Management
Associates, 1990; \$12.95.

Does your life need a change? Do you feel like a stranger in your community or church? Volunteering your time and gifts is a perfect solution to these feelings.

If you are a person looking for a volunteer experience, this book offers a variety of suggestions on where to go, how to get started and what to expect. If you are one of the "seasoned"—maybe even "burned-out"—volunteers, inspirational messages could help you get that spark of enthusiasm back in your giving. A volunteer coordinator can find a virtual storehouse of recruiting, training and motivational ideas in this resource to improve the quality of their programs.

Wilson's message is that your life, both spiritual and personal, will grow beyond your expectations through volunteering.

*Julie Ahlman Higgins
White Bear Lake, Minnesota*

Seasons of a Lifetime: A Treasury of Meditations

Gerhard E. Frost

Augsburg, 1989; \$9.95.

This collection of writings by the late Gerhard Frost traces the seasons and rhythms of a life's journey in depth.

This book celebrates those ordinary experiences of family and relationships that are the true revelation

of God's presence in our everyday lives.

Readers will draw on this treasury of meditations for many years to come. The words of personal encouragement comprise meditations for all generations. It would be a wonderful addition to any collection, to reread, rediscover and rejoice over.

*Crysta Wille
Chicago, Illinois*

The Big Book for Peace

edited by Ann Durell

and Marilyn Sachs

(Dutton Children's Books,
1990; \$15.95).

If you love children, if you long for peace, you will cherish this book. If you know children's literature, you will recognize contributing authors: Charlotte Zolotow, Steven Kellogg, Katherine Paterson, Marilyn Sachs, to name a few. Even if you are unfamiliar with children's literature, you will appreciate the incredible illustrations by Maurice Sendak, Barbara Cooney, Teri Sloat, Jon Agee, and other "greats."

This volume includes peaceful fairy tales, stories, poetry, nonfiction historic accounts, a song. Together, the parts of the collection offer a powerful testimony for peace.

The authors and illustrators donated their works and have waived royalties. Income from the sale of the book is donated to Amnesty International, The Carter Center's Conflict Resolution Program, Greenpeace, The Lion and the Lamb Peace Arts Center, and SANE/FREEZE.

*Sue Edison-Swift
Park Ridge, Illinois*

Justice for Women

Linda Daniels-Block



Last Mother's Day, as my family and I walked to the restaurant from the car, a woman came up to us. She asked us where the nearest shelter was. She had been to several places and they kept referring her elsewhere. "If it were just me it would be different, but I'm scared for my daughter."

Like many women and children today, she and her daughter were homeless, hungry, fearing for their safety. We gave what money we had, but wished we could do more. We were frustrated by our powerlessness to make a difference in the lives of the millions of women and children who live in poverty.

In response to such massive and often worsening conditions of women here and around the world, the Christian churches of the world have united in an Ecumenical Decade of Church in Solidarity with Women, 1988-1998. This is the first time the churches of the world have united their voices for women. The first of three global goals for this effort is: *"To work for justice for women—to promote the safety and dignity of women and to end the suffering of women at home and around the world."*

By uniting our voices and efforts we *can* make a difference. Alone we may be relatively powerless, but united ecumenically as Christians in our communities and in the world we can respond in Christ's love to the incredible injustices women face.

Where can you begin?

♦ **Begin in your own community.** Work with women and men from neighborhood churches to determine local needs and issues of justice for women (for example, safety, housing, health care, child care and education). Then plan a strategy to begin addressing the most urgent needs.

♦ **Meet with area social service networks,** shelters for women, food pantries, health professionals. Ask questions like "What are your needs?" and "How can I or my church help fulfill them?"

Organize a neighborhood meeting and invite a police officer who is assigned your "beat" to speak and answer questions. Ask how safe it is for women in your neighborhood. **Volunteer at a shelter** and spend time with the women. Listen to them what they need.

Learn about the shelters, food and clothing banks, grass-roots assistance and neighborhood programs accessible and available to help women and children. What talents can you contribute?

Look at "Ecumenical Decade" materials. For a list of some of the resources available, contact the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Commission for Women, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631; phone 800/638-3522, ext. 0.

Our strength in Christ is in the community of Christ, as we come together to seek the empowerment and vision to minister to our neighbors.

The Decade begins at home." You are your own experts, so bring people together, check it out, think creatively, make plans and respond. It's time to put aside any feelings we may have that we don't know enough, don't have the skills, or that there is someone else who is an expert. If we are willing to serve, the Spirit is willing to supply the empowerment for serving. God bless you in your efforts! ■

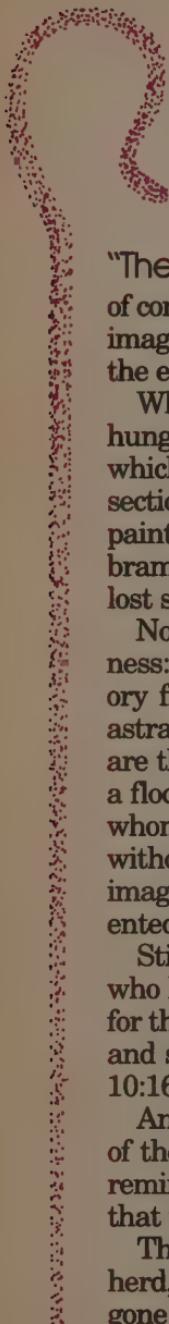
Rev. Linda Daniels-Block and her husband, the Rev. Jerry Block, are copastors at Shepherd of the Hills in Boulder, Colorado. They have two young children.

THE ECUMENICAL DECADE: CHURCHES IN SOLIDARITY WITH WOMEN— What It Is and What It Is Not"

Prepared for 1991 Women of the ELCA leadership gatherings, this 12-minute video provides clear and practical information on the Ecumenical Decade to help you get started, or to inspire your next steps.

◆ Purchase the video for \$10 plus shipping and handling from the ELCA Distribution Service, 800/328-4648, code 69-3076. Or,

◆ Rent it for \$7.50 on a one-use basis from Augsburg Fortress Audiovisual, 800/328-4648, ext. 352, code AV-3076.



a shepherd

Carol J. Mork

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Words of comfort and solace. Familiar words. Words calling up the image of God as protective shepherd, tending the flock on the edges of mountain crags.

When I think "shepherd," I first think of a picture that hung in my aunt and uncle's farmhouse. The artwork, which was about an inch thick, was on a diagonal cross-section of an old tree. In this picture, the solitary shepherd, painted in dark hues on lined wood, walked away from a bramblebush carrying the bruised and bloody body of one lost sheep. "The Lord is *my* shepherd." *I* am the lost sheep.

Now another image of a shepherd comes into consciousness: lines from the prophet Isaiah, imprinted on my memory from Handel's *Messiah*, "All we like sheep have gone astray, . . . we have turned everyone to [our] own way." We are the sheep, and God is the shepherd finding us. We are a flock of wayward, wandering sheep, part of the crowd on whom Jesus had compassion "because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34). And the power of the image of God as shepherd rescues a world lost and disoriented, in which each one turns to their own way.

Still a third image emerges, one of the "good shepherd" who himself becomes the sheep, freely laying down his life for the sheep in his charge! This shepherd has but one flock and seeks to bring "other sheep . . . not of this fold" (John 10:16) into it.

An image often used when someone is dying, the image of the shepherd is, finally, an image for life. John's gospel reminds us that the good shepherd claimed, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (10:10b).

The Lord is *my* shepherd, yes. The Lord is also *our* shepherd, calling to make one flock all we who have "like sheep gone astray." ■

Carol J. Mork, one of three "God Is Like . . ." columnists, is unit advisor for Lutheran Brotherhood fraternal activities in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Broken Hearts, Strong Spirits

Sonia C. Groenewold

s women with broken hearts so often do, the women of Liberia did whatever was necessary to nurture, protect and feed their loved ones.

While a civil war is fought literally in their own back yards, the women of Liberia are not only surviving, they are also sharing their strength, their talents, their bounty—little as might be—with those around them.

Since the war began in December 1989, they have seen people butchered and killed in front of them, they have been routed from their homes, they have had all their possessions stolen and they have been separated from family and friends for months at a time.

Yet when I visited Liberia last April and May, the unwavering faith of the Liberian women I met strengthened my own. The women spoke with certainty of God's protection and direct guidance in their lives. They saw the miracles that we in North America might tend to overlook or credit to technology.

C*, a Lutheran and a strong advocate for peace, told me, "Through it all, God watched over us. God is good no matter what happened. We went through all these things, and God kept us alive."

When chased from their home, C and her family traveled on foot with only the clothes on their backs—and their Bible. She told me that her family had prepared to leave their home the night before. For some reason,

she felt they should stay one more night. She told her family, "Let's stay here and pray, and we'll leave tomorrow." They did. Later they learned that all the families who had left the previous night had passed through one of many checkpoints only to be sprayed with soldiers' bullets once they reached the other side. "They were all killed," C told me.



Many mothers, like this one, take in infants who have been orphaned or whose parents are displaced and their whereabouts unknown. Liberians prefer this solution to orphanages for children left homeless.



Liberian women and the writer share a meal of rice and greens from common bowl, Liberian style.

Although she does not know why she was spared and others were not, she knows what she has to do. C frequently testifies to the God who saved her.

As people were chased from their homes, those fortunate enough to stay in theirs opened them up to others. O* kept some 30 people at her house. Making the food stretch was a problem, she and other women said. The stores and markets were no longer operating, soldiers had looted the gardens and starvation was a daily reality.

Women used their creativity and a large measure of faith to feed their families and others to whom they opened their doors and their hearts. "I made pancakes out of rice cereal," E* said, "and often I made one or two cups of rice stretch to feed 20 people in my house. Sometimes I made meals out of chickenfeed. I sifted and sifted it, got the corn out, soaked that in hot water overnight and added oil and tomato for a meal. Or I made the corn into a flour to add to the soup."

When S* escaped with her family, they headed out on foot to nowhere in particular. While they were searching for safety, she saw dead bodies everywhere. "We didn't dare cry or they [the soldiers] would kill us too," she said. "All the pain and that hurt was just there. It couldn't come out through tears. Nothing had any meaning when it came to life. That's when we come face to face with God."

B* agreed. "The war has brought me closer to the reality that God exists," she said. "We have to have that personal relationship to hang on when all else is gone. Nowhere is safe. The war has taught us to trust God."

A nursing director, B spent seven months in the bush hiding with her small son. "I could always see the hand of the Lord. There is always something to be thankful for," she said.

M* is one of many women who have taken in children orphaned by the war. M's home was burned when

Her elderly mother was inside. Her mother died later in the war, and she has not been seen or heard from her sisters. She now has a five-year-old displaced boy in her care. His parents were killed in the massacre of 600 people at St. Peter Lutheran Church in the capital city of Monrovia July 1990.

Displaced herself, M is using her medical knowledge to serve the sick and wounded where she is. "I'm very tired," M said, "but what can I do? I pray God that everything will settle down. And I take one day at a time."

E*, an elderly woman who has had nothing from any of her children throughout the war and who wonders whether they are dead or alive, told me joyfully, "We have the greatest riches in Jesus Christ."

The loss of material goods "altered my outlook on life," Y* said. "Life doesn't consist in an abundance of things possessed. Nor is doing as important as being," she said. Giving her energies daily to help malnourished and sick children, Y—whose husband and children are alive but cannot live with her—knows with certainty that "God is in control." She is learning to live one day at a time. "We spend so much time planning and planning," B said, "and we don't see how the Lord is planning for us. But life is richer and fuller now, even though many things are gone." ■

Nina C. Groenewold is features editor of The Lutheran.

Because the war continues, initials are used for security reasons.

Baptismal Journey

Today,

A warm, gentle shower washed
my soul
with raindrop memories of
renewing grace!

of
listening
and
caring

(In the name of the father . . .)

of
healing
and
sharing

(. . . and of the Son . . .)

of
affirming
and
preparing

(. . . and of the Holy Spirit).

Memories of our time together
washed away
the chill uncertainty of now.

How blessed I am
that we have been
Companions for the Journey.

*Judy Rahjes
Kensington, Kansas*

Designated Gifts: Wonder-Full Opportunities in 1992

Wonder is appropriate in 1992, as Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America focuses on Women: Blessing.

Let us wonder about all the opportunities the ELCA and Women of the ELCA have for ministry. About the women and children who live in poverty. About those who need to hear the gospel in ways that are appropriate to their culture, and those whose health, education or economic situation limit their ability to stand in wonder at God's grace and goodness.

In 1992 Women of the ELCA has named ministries and set goals for sharing the wonder of God's love through these designated gifts:

MINISTRIES OF THE ELCA

- ◆ ELCA World Hunger Appeal
Program No. 555 \$100,000
- ◆ Evangelistic Outreach and Church Development in Tanzania and South Africa
Program No. 557 25,000
- ◆ Missionary Support
Program No. 570 100,000
- ◆ Mission Development with the Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia
Program No. 571 75,000
- ◆ Leadership Development in Central and South America, South Asia, and Madagascar
Program No. 573 90,000
- ◆ Center for Lay Ministry Development in Appalachia
Program No. 580 20,000

- ◆ Mission with Women and Struggling Persons in India
Program No. 591 25,000
- ◆ Health Ministry in Dade City, Florida, and Somerset County, Kentucky
Program No. 592 45,000
- ◆ Maritime Ministry in Long Beach, California, and East Boston, Massachusetts
Program No. 593 20,000

MINISTRIES OF WOMEN OF THE ELCA

(Amounts Unlimited)

- ◆ Supporting Ministries of Women through Programs in ELCA Colleges and Seminaries
Program No. 521
- ◆ Scholarships
Program No. 523
- ◆ Campaign in Support of Women in Namibia
Program No. 527
- ◆ Grants: Women and Children Living in Poverty
Program No. 528

Make checks payable to "Women of the ELCA." Identify the program number on your check and mail to: Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4111. Your gift will make a wonder-full difference!

*Bonnie Belasic
Director for Communication
and Stewardship Interpretation*

SSION: ACTION

Women of the ELCA Hold Environmental Conference

With the lush Blue Ridge Mountains as their backdrop, participants at Women of the ELCA's recent environmental conference learned about the degradation of the planet and the steps they can take to preserve creation.

Caring for Creation: A Challenge to the Church," held in Black Mountain, North Carolina, was the first churchwide conference in the ELCA to focus solely on the environment. One of the major goals was to move people beyond thinking about recycling and plastic foam to help them think in terms of the global complexities of environmental issues.

Calvin DeWitt, director of the Institute of Environmental Studies in Madison, Wisconsin, offered a scriptural basis for care of the earth. "The scriptures are kind of an ecological handbook on how rightly to live on earth," DeWitt said. "Our challenge now is to move forth," DeWitt continued. "Will the creation change at our coming? Or will it say, 'aha, here come the children of God?'"

The connection between the oppression of women and the domination of nature was addressed by Roman Catholic theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether. Dagmar Celeste, former first lady of Ohio, told participants, "We know women have been called to care for creation. Find the courage to change the things you can."



Gerald Barney, a member of the ELCA and director of the Institute for 21st Century Studies, focused on science and the beginning of the universe. "Every one of us . . . we were all right there at the beginning. Every particle of every thing . . . was right there," he said. "We are the Earth. We are the people who have been created and asked by the creator to overcome the destructive behavior we've been engaged in. Go out there and think about what you can do and get started with it."

Annette Janka, an ELCA deaconess, artist and environmentalist from Valdez, Alaska, wove together music she played on the harp and dulcimer with readings, songs and photography depicting both beauty and destruction. A square dance with live music fostered fellowship among conference participants who included, in addition to Women of the ELCA, representatives of the ELCA hunger, youth ministries, and outdoor ministries programs.

*Debra Illingworth Greene
for Mission: Action*

A Family Blessing

The Old Testament images of family are strong and vivid ones. Caring, supporting and protecting one another was essential for family. The charge of teaching young ones to remember God's covenant with us was of great significance. Moses spoke to the people about God's commandments: "Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 11:19, New Revised Standard Version).

The program "My Family, My Witness" encourages women to share intentionally the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ with family members.

Today family members don't seem to find time to talk to each other. They are overwhelmed by social pressures. Our families are in crisis, and for most not even the church has an answer. If Moses were alive today he might say, "And teach your children God's promises, talking of them when you are not watching television, and when you are walking to the car, and for a moment before you go to bed and the moment you rise."

It is not a matter of not having time or making time, but of taking time at every opportunity. Our family can only be a place of support and nurture if we make every effort to teach and model what is necessary.

We can take charge by first developing a prayer life for ourselves. A personal relationship with God can provide a model for those with whom we live. Next begin to share with family members our own personal witness. It must first be evident that "this is important in my life."

Women are the primary caretakers, and through women the crisis facing families will be lifted. Women of the ELCA witness to the church as it speaks to relationships of the family. The *Blessed Are You* program idea book provides a plan for women to start. The program "My Family, My Witness" encourages women to share intentionally the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ with family members. Women can use this to build or strengthen community within the family and church. Cost of *Blessed Are You*, catalog number 2-9209, is \$5.95 (plus shipping and handling). Order from your nearest Augsburg Fortress location, or call 800/328-4648.

*Valora Starr
Director for Growth
and Witness*

Hear Our Prayer*

Joyce Breen

reator God, I love you so much and I love your creation, too. Everything is covered with snow now, but I remember the colors and boldness of your designs. Melt the coldness in my heart with your love, even as the sun shines on the earth and brings back abundant life.

acious God, When depression threatens to settle around us as a cloud, we will look to you, our Savior and Redeemer. Save us from self-pity and bring us back into the Son-shine.

ar Lord Jesus, You gave yourself to the world without strings attached, yet we sometimes try to control those around us like puppets on a stage. Teach us the value of a gift freely given and help us relinquish control where it is not needed.

ar Lamb of God, Thank you for taking the road of suffering for me. Forgive, cleanse and renew me so that nothing stops me from accepting the full benefit of your salvation.

epherd of our Hearts, I praise you and thank you for your constant presence. You give me such tender care. Speak to my whole being now as I rest. Guide me even as I sleep, for you are my security and protection.

Jesus, you've done so much for us. We want to respond to your love. Show us what to say, where to go, when to be quiet and when to stay home. Use us to strengthen your kingdom, Lord.

O God, it is too difficult to praise you today. In fact, I guess I'm angry with you. My hopes and dreams appear shattered . . . the future looks dreary. Although deep in my heart I know you are in control, my feelings are overwhelming. Help me in the midst of this to offer what seems like a sacrifice of praise.

Heavenly Father, Forgive me for the times I have not valued and appreciated the person that I am, the person you created. Show me the balance between loving myself and recognizing my sin. Help me to love you first, above all, and then to love myself so that I will be free to love and serve others.

Joyce Breen is a wife, mother, volunteer and piano teacher who lives in River Falls, Wisconsin. She serves on the churchwide executive board of Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

*The prayers on this page and on page 48 are offered by two active Women of the ELCA participants for use individually or for group devotions.

O Precious Lord*

Ramona Cecille Carroll

God, Almighty, we praise you this day for creating us in your image, for forgiving us through the blood of Jesus and for keeping us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dear God, we thank you, thank you for breath in our lungs and blood running through our veins. Thank you for the gift of life!

God of compassion and strength, we pray for our loved ones and for those whom you love. Especially we pray for those caught up in addiction, unresolved anger and unspeakable depression.

Sweet Jesus, we boldly bring the little children to you. We bring our healthy children, our homeless children, our babies with AIDS, our babies who are addicted, and our babies who will not live to see their first birthday.

God of the living and of the dead, we pray for all who live near the threshold of death, the entrance to Life. Strengthen us, O God, to comfort and support them.

God of our weary years, we praise you for the lives of women who have made the United States a more inclusive place to live: Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and the Grimké sisters.

For women and children without any place to lay their heads, we pray, O God.

Help us who believe that we are not good enough, to know that you created us all in your image.

Gracious God, bless and encourage those who are out of work, underpaid or working over the limit.

In the midnight hour of our sin, God, awaken us to forgiveness from Jesus, the Bright and Morning Star. Help us to rejoice in the freedom we have to be the children of God.

We pray for health for the sick. For blessed assurance for the dying. And for courage for the living.

God of comfort and rest, we are restless about many things. Lead us to discover our rest in you.

Ramona Cecille Carroll is a freelance writer and mother of three. She is a student at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia and vicar at St. Michael's Lutheran Church, Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

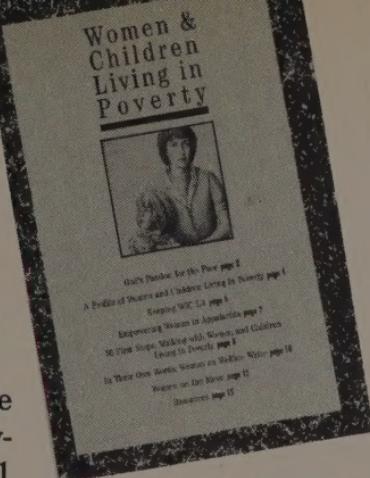
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